

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Claim 5 has been amended and claims 7-9 have been added as follows:

**Listing of Claims:**

Claim 1 (original): A method of forming a product of a metal-based composite material, characterized by comprising:

the step of preparing a billet of a metal-based composite material by mixing a metal matrix and a ceramic reinforcing material;

the step of heating the billet to a specific temperature; and

the step of pressure forming the heated billet in a die assembly, so that the billet may have a compression ratio  $H/h$  1 differing from one portion of the formed product to another to give the formed product a ceramic volume content differing from one portion to another, where  $H$  is the height of the billet prior to forming and  $h$  1 is its height after forming.

Claim 2 (original): The method of claim 1, wherein the billet has a height varying from one portion to another.

Claim 3 (original): The method of claim 1, wherein the pressure forming employs a split die assembly.

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Claim 4 (original): The method of claim 1, wherein the pressure forming employs a die assembly having heat insulation in its portions contacting the billet.

Claim 5 (currently amended): The method of claim 1, ~~2, 3 or 4~~, wherein an aluminum alloy is employed as the matrix, and an alumina aggregate as the ceramic.

Claim 6 (original): The method of claim 1, wherein the step of heating is carried out for heating the billet to or above 580°C.

Claim 7 (new): The method of claim 2, wherein an aluminum alloy is employed as the matrix, and an alumina aggregate as the ceramic.

Claim 8 (new): The method of claim 3, wherein an aluminum alloy is employed as the matrix, and an alumina aggregate as the ceramic.

Claim 9 (new): The method of claim 4, wherein an aluminum alloy is employed as the matrix, and an alumina aggregate as the ceramic.